

## EARLY CHILDHOOD TRANSITION

Transitions are defined as points of change in personnel who coordinate and deliver services to students with disabilities and their families, as well as changes in the actual services. Periods of transition present an array of challenges and a sense of uncertainty to families, educators, and all service providers. Transition issues include the:

- Shift from one service system to another.
- Differences in eligibility requirements.
- New demands for child participation.
- Differing expectations for child behavior and “readiness.”
- New types and levels of staff involvement and training.
- Philosophical shifts in intervention models.

Careful and thoughtful planning by the *Individualized Education Plan* (IEP) team ensures a smooth and coordinated movement between programs and services. The Transition Timeline and Events Checklists contain a summary of activities that facilitate effective transitions for children, their families, and the programs that support them.

In Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) there are two major transition points:

- When students move from Part C services to Part B services of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA).
- When students transition from ECSE preschool programs to the regular kindergarten school-age programs.

This appendix delineates the components and responsibilities involved in a coordinated and effective transition process from Part C’s early intervention programs to Part B services, or to other appropriate community services.

### Overview

#### Rationale for Planning Transitions

Transitions are crucial times for decision making about children’s services. The transition process should:

- Ensure continuity of services.
- Minimize disruptions to the family system by facilitating adaptation to change.
- Ensure that a child is prepared to function in the receiving program and that service providers are prepared to meet the needs of the child.
- Fulfill the legal requirements of Parts B and C of the IDEA.

# Legal Requirements for Transition Planning

## Part B Requirements

Under Part B of the IDEA, the State Department of Education shall have policies and procedures for transition from Part C Infant and Toddler services to Part B early childhood special education services. These policies and procedures shall ensure that children participating in early intervention programs assisted under Part C will experience a smooth and effective transition to early childhood special education services under Part B. In addition, districts will participate in transition planning conferences arranged by the designated lead agency under Part C, which is the Department of Health and Welfare Infant Toddler Program in the State of Idaho. Eligibility shall be determined under Part B of the IDEA, and an IEP or an *Individualized Family Service Plan* (IFSP) shall be developed and implemented by the third (3<sup>rd</sup>) birthday of a child who is currently receiving services through the Infant Toddler Program.

A referral to consider a special education evaluation should be completed by the:

- Infant Toddler Program
- Private preschool or childcare providers
- Head Start or Even Start programs
- Directly from parents

Pre-referral and evaluation policies and procedures for all children are located in the Idaho Special Education Chapter in Chapter 3 and 4. A more detailed description of all the transition requirements can be found in the Implementing the Requirements of ECSE Interagency Agreements section, p. H-4.

## Part C Requirements

The Department of Health and Welfare's Infant Toddler Program is the lead agency for services to infants and toddlers, birth through thirty-six (36) months of age under Part C of the IDEA. The Infant Toddler Program is required to have policies and procedures to ensure a smooth transition for toddlers receiving early intervention services. The policies and procedures shall include a description of how families will be included in the transition plan and, if appropriate, how and when the local district where the child resides will be notified that the child will shortly reach the age of eligibility for preschool services under Part B.

Transition related Outcomes and activities shall be incorporated into the IFSP for all children over two years of age or exiting from the Infant Toddler Program. Parents shall be included in planning what types of services and where future services will be provided to their child. When considering the transition, Infant Toddler Program staff will explore a variety of community options with the family (e.g., private childcare programs, neighborhood play groups, Head Start, structured recreational opportunities, developmental preschool programs, etc.) to determine the most appropriate setting that will meet the child and family's need for ongoing support and services after exiting the Infant Toddler Program. A transition planning conference will be scheduled involving representatives from selected program(s) at least ninety (90) days (and at the

discretion of all parties, up to nine (9) months) before the child becomes eligible for those services.

In the case of a child for whom ECSE preschool services in the district may be appropriate, a transition planning conference, with family approval, will be conducted by the Infant Toddler Program with the family and the district. The planning conference will occur at least ninety (90) days (and at the discretion of all parties, up to nine (9) months) before the child is eligible for Part B ECSE services. Discussion at the transition conference will include information related to the transition process: assessment; placement options; or other areas of concern to the family, child, or program personnel.

Samples of the following forms are included in Appendix H of the *Infant Toddler Program Interim Implementation Manual*:

- Comparison of IEP and IFSP
- Transition Timeline
- Transition Checklist from Infant Toddler Program to Preschool Services
- Interagency Protocol Worksheets

## **Implementing the Interagency Agreements Requirements for ECSE Services and Early Intervention Services for Children Ages Two Through Five**

Since children receive services from different agencies during transition, interagency coordination and cross agency linkages are crucial. These linkages establish lines of responsibility and coordinate facets of the process including Child Find, referral and assessment, and eligibility requirements. Interagency agreements exist to ensure a smooth transition from Part C to Part B, or other services, for children with disabilities and their families. A state interagency agreement exists between the State Department of Education, the Infant Toddler Program, Head Start, and Migrant Head Start to clarify responsibilities of each agency during the transition process. A local interagency protocol should also exist between local districts, local Head Start programs, the regional Infant Toddler Program, and other service providers as appropriate to address specific procedures relevant to each local agency.

Successful transitions promote:

- Family involvement and empowerment by assessing needs, exchanging information, and developing appropriate Outcomes.
- Appropriate child preparation through assessment of the child and the development of steps to help the child adjust to, and function in, new settings.
- Effective communications, joint decision-making, and shared responsibility among all team members.
- Placement decisions that meet each child's individual needs.
- Uninterrupted services.

- Non-confrontational and effective models of advocacy that families can emulate throughout their children's lives.
- Avoidance of duplication in assessment and goal planning.
- Reduced stress for children, families, and service providers.

### **Local Interagency Protocols and Components**

Local school districts, Department of Health and Welfare, Head Start, Migrant Head Start and other local provider representatives agree to develop written interagency protocols that delineate roles and responsibilities. Protocols may be developed by any combination of districts and agencies as locally determined and should be as specific as parties deem necessary. These protocols shall be reviewed annually and updated as needed. The local school district will ensure that interagency protocols are developed. Copies of written protocols will be included in each school district's application for federal funds. Copies of the Interagency Protocols will be distributed to appropriate staff to ensure a clear understanding of and compliance with the protocol. Protocols may include but are not necessarily limited to:

- Contact information for each agency,
- Child Find responsibilities,
- Referral contacts,
- Exchange of information,
- Team/family transition planning meeting at least ninety (90) days and up to six (6) months prior to the child's third (3<sup>rd</sup>) birthday ,
- Transition contacts/timelines/meeting requirements,
- Evaluations,
- Use of IFSP or IEP at transition, and
- Agency dispute process or acceptance and use of the dispute process outlined in this agreement.

The interagency protocol may be expanded, at the discretion of the parties, to include specifics regarding the following topics:

- Staff positions that will attend the transition planning conference and/or IEP/IFSP team meetings,

- Roles and responsibilities of team members attending transition planning conference and/or IEP/IFSP meetings,
- Procedures and agenda items for required transition and IEP meetings,
- Procedures for making placement decisions,
- Development of community linkages for inclusive environments,
- Financial and child count responsibilities,
- Transportation arrangements,
- Joint training efforts,
- Policies and procedures for exchanging confidential education records, and
- Process for monitoring the agreement.

### **Agency Responsibilities During Transition**

Each agency cooperating in the transition process should be aware of their specific obligations during the procedural requirements listed below. The local interagency agreement protocol between the State Department of Education, Infant Toddler Program, Head Start, and Migrant Head Start can be helpful in outlining these obligations in writing.

1. At the second (2<sup>nd</sup>) birthday IFSP, the Infant Toddler Program will address steps to support transition to meet the needs of the child and family. They will advise the family of placement and service options available, including Head Start and other community resources, for placement when the child turns age three (3).
2. The Infant Toddler Program is responsible for notifying the receiving agency that children will be transitioning into their program. This notification must be given at least six (6) months prior to each child's third (3<sup>rd</sup>) birthday. The Infant Toddler Program is responsible for obtaining parental consent prior to the exchange of confidential information.
3. The Infant Toddler Program shall coordinate with the receiving agency to ensure that existing assessment information to assist in determining eligibility and programming is compiled and given to the receiving program prior to or at the transition-planning meeting. The team should consider the needs of the child, the assessment tools used, and IDEA requirements for eligibility when determining how current an assessment shall be.
4. The Infant Toddler Program will convene a Transition Planning Meeting at least ninety (90) calendar days prior to the child's third (3<sup>rd</sup>) birthday. The child's IFSP must include steps to be taken to support the transition of the child to Part B or other appropriate services. The Infant Toddler Program will be responsible for including the family in the transition process,

and will provide notice to the family of transition activities and of the family's rights under Part B of the IDEA.

5. The district will participate with the Infant Toddler Program in a transition planning conference. A *Referral to Consider a Special Education Evaluation* will be completed and *Procedural Safeguards Notice* will be given and explained to the parents. The evaluation team, including the parent will review existing assessment information, identifying what additional evaluations/assessments, if any, are needed to determine eligibility for Part B services. The evaluation team may meet with or without a face-to-face meeting, unless requested by the parent. Under Part B of IDEA, the parent is a member of the evaluation team and shall be provided an opportunity to give input and participate in making team decisions.
6. If additional assessments are needed, the participants will determine who will be the most appropriate person/agency to conduct needed assessments and *Consent for Initial Assessment* will be obtained by the school district. If no additional assessments are needed and existing assessment data from Part C will be used, parents will be given *Prior Written Notice* and notified they may request additional assessments.
7. Agencies should coordinate their efforts together using appropriate formal and informal assessment information to determine eligibility under Part B. The team may use traditional norm-or criterion-referenced assessments, or a performance-based assessment to support eligibility determination. Please refer Chapter 4 of the *Idaho Special Education Manual* for complete information on eligibility.

NOTE: Agencies shall ensure that eligibility decisions are made prior to the district's summer break so that the Infant Toddler Program may continue to serve eligible children during the summer months in accordance with the local interagency protocol.
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8. If the child's third (3<sup>rd</sup>) birthday occurs before May 1<sup>st</sup> of a given school year, and the child has been determined eligible for service under Part B, the district will provide services from the third (3<sup>rd</sup>) birthday through the remainder of the school year unless a local interagency agreement or IEP/IFSP specifies differently.

If the child's third (3<sup>rd</sup>) birthday occurs after May 1<sup>st</sup> of the given school year, and the child had been determined eligible for Part B services and parental consent for Part B services has been gained, In accordance with the local interagency protocols, the Infant Toddler Program may provide services throughout the summer until the beginning of the district's school year. New referrals taken during the summer will be processed as soon as possible when the school district resumes services in the fall.

9. The district and/or the Infant Toddler Program will conduct needed evaluations/assessments prior to the child's third (3<sup>rd</sup>) birthday. Eligibility for Part B services can be determined at the transition planning conference if sufficient information is available and all required evaluation team members are present, or through another method or meeting prior to the child's third (3<sup>rd</sup>) birthday. Parents shall be provided a copy of the Part B Eligibility Report.

10. An IEP can be developed at the transition planning conference (if all required IEP team members are present), or at another IEP team meeting prior to the child's third (3<sup>rd</sup>) birthday. Parents shall be informed of their right to invite Infant Toddler Program representatives to the initial IEP meeting. The IEP/IFSP team, including the parent, will develop an IEP or accept the IFSP, which includes the IEP components. If the district and parent agree to use an IFSP, the district shall provide the parent with a detailed explanation of the differences between an IFSP and an IEP and obtain written consent.
11. The district shall obtain parental *Consent for Initial Placement* in Part B services. The IEP/IFSP team, including the parent, will review all service and placement options after annual goals are selected. Placement discussion should be centered on the least restrictive environment in which the goals can be addressed with supports and accommodations.
12. All appropriate records will be transferred to the new program in a timely manner.
13. Head Start and Migrant Head Start will initiate and participate in a transition planning conference with the district for children with disabilities who are enrolled in their programs. Local interagency protocols will specify timelines and responsibilities for transitions from these programs.

## **Collaborative Planning and Coordination**

Transitions require a great deal of effective communication and coordination among the agencies and programs that provide services to young children with disabilities and their families. Interagency cooperation must occur at all levels: agency, building, classroom; and between teachers, developmental specialists, and therapists. Transition agreements and strategies shall be adapted to address different types of services and systems to meet the needs of children and families from different cultural, linguistic, ethnic, racial, and socio-economic backgrounds. Some effective strategies include:

- Ensuring that all participants (family members and professionals), have information about the child/family concerns and priorities.
- Providing families with information in formats that match the needs of the family (written vs. oral, group vs. individual, video) and including opportunities for program visitation.
- Assessing and teaching the skills needed by the child in the next environment.
- Coordinating training of personnel between programs.

## **Part C Transition Planning**

For an effective transition to occur for a specific child, planning should allow for team discussions and the time to make individualized decisions about evaluations, services, monitoring, transition activities, and placement for the child with disabilities.

A Part C transitional IFSP written by the Infant Toddler Program and family, along with participation of the district, should address the following:

- Assess the sending and receiving environments to determine skills needed by the child.
- Develop transition goals that will prepare the child for changes in service delivery and help the child adjust to or function in new settings.
- Develop benchmarks/Objectives for the IFSP or IEP including activities that the parent has requested to support transition.
- Determine what additional information is needed to help the receiving program understand the child's current needs.
- Include activities needed by service providers in the receiving program to best meet the needs of the child (e.g., site visits, training opportunities, etc.).

### **Family/Parent Involvement**

The one constant component in a child's life, as the child moves through the continuum of agencies and services, is the family. While all children experience transition in their early years, children with developmental challenges and their families may experience more frequent and more intense transitions in necessary services. Family concerns during the transition process are increased by changes in friendship ties and service delivery systems as the child moves from home-based to more center-based and child-focused services. The parent is ultimately responsible for the child's development, education, and social and emotional well-being. Parents should be empowered to function as educated decision makers, caregivers, teachers, and advocates for their children.

Even after the child's transition has occurred, a systematic method for effectively involving the parent should be developed. The following are a few of the many possible materials and activities that may be helpful to parents during the transition process:

- District parent orientation packet.
- District parent handbook or manual.
- Materials and contacts for Idaho Parents Unlimited.
- Parent information or support groups in partnership with Idaho Parents Unlimited.
- Parent-child play groups.
- Parent classroom volunteer programs.

It is important to gain information regarding satisfaction toward the transition process, identify areas of continued concern, and generate a list of potential activities that could be implemented. The district and Infant Toddler Program must ensure that families have all the necessary information regarding program operation, parental rights, and parental responsibilities. A parent handbook is useful in providing this information to the child's family. An emphasis on including parents as equal partners will help ensure a smooth transition for children with disabilities



